

ON TRACK WITH MDT

September 2001

As summer ends and thousands of children head back to school, we feel it's a good time to reflect on safety issues and remind everyone to drive the roadways with caution.

Even though fall is upon us, major road construction is still underway. Statewide, MDT has 71 ongoing construction projects, and it is important for both the workers (MCA and MDT folks) and the general public to use caution in and around these zones.

According to data compiled by the Analysis Division of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation, there were 868 fatalities and 51,000 injuries in United States work zones in 1999 alone. We all need to do our part to make work zones safer, whether that be wearing appropriate safety gear when out on a site or obeying flaggers and reduced speed limits when traveling through a project. Together, we can do our part.

Doing our part also means paying special attention to school-related traffic. The National School Transportation Association reported 18 children killed while entering and exiting the bus in 1998, seven by vehicles passing a stopped bus. We all need to stop for a school bus that is loading or unloading passengers, and we need to stay alert for children walking in the street, crossing the street or just playing near the street.

As parents, we also need to help our children by teaching them good safety practices. It's always a good idea to accompany your children to and from school to make sure they know what to do – plus, you learn just how risky their route is. Please be a good role model and show them the ways of safety instead of just telling them.

Further, students riding on the school bus need to know the rules that will protect and enhance their safety. Children need to respect the driver and follow his or her instructions to protect themselves throughout their bus ride. Students also need to know about the "danger zone," that area behind and on all sides of the bus where children may not be seen by the bus driver. The area in front of the bus can be dangerous, too, as children sometimes dart out into the street without looking left, right and left again for traffic. The Montana Highway Patrol 2000 Annual Report, in citing 22,263 total reported crashes in calendar year 2000, stated that more crashes occurred between 3 and 4 p.m. than at any other hour of the day and on Friday more than any other day of the week, with the most fatal crashes occurring during the month of September. Reported crashes increased 5.6% over 1999; injuries, 3.5%; and deaths, 7.7%. These numbers are cause for concern, and we must each do our part to bring these numbers back down. We can do that by paying attention to what's going on around us – and by keeping distractions to a minimum.

There's one other thing I want to bring to your attention. National School Bus Safety Week is scheduled for October 15-21. Frankly, it's a good time to help remind all motorists and the general public of the need to drive carefully and to watch out for our future, our kids. Local schools often have a celebration in this week, and I'm sure they'd appreciate any and all offers of support.

As we look toward winter, I want to thank all MCA members for their commitment to constructing quality roads throughout Montana. Three-quarters of the way through federal fiscal year 2001, we had already obligated \$250.4 million of our \$259 million target. As a result, we have submitted a request for additional (redistribution) funds from the Federal Highway Administration so that we can continue to let projects through September 30, which marks the end of the federal fiscal year. We are awaiting a response to our request, and I will notify both you and the press upon receipt of any additional funds.

Thank you again for all your hard work.

Dave Galt
Director